

PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF A CORE ENERGETIC GROUP

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I have a passion for groups. It started in 1976 when I was a member of a group led by John Pierrakos, M.D. and he cast his magic spell on me. That he could receive whatever came towards him and remain confrontative and loving at the same time was a great model for me. I wanted more, so I became a student of the Institute of the New Age, which was a precursor of the Institute of Core Energetics. This led to one of the most difficult and wonderful experiences of my life. Completion of the program required apprenticeship with a senior therapist, and I apprenticed for three years with my wife, Devera. The difficult part was giving over to her leadership and being in a supportive role. The wonderful part was giving over to her leadership, supporting her, admiring how much she knew, and how she used her knowledge and herself. I began doing groups and workshops whenever I could: workshops at the Association of Humanistic Psychology, the Open Center, the Phoenicia Pathwork Center and groups for dentists. Now I lead groups at the Institute of Core Energetics.

I think groups present the greatest potential for effect and change in an individual than any other therapeutic form. The purpose of a group is to create an environment where people can explore their deepest life struggles, feel seen, feel safe, and heal distortions and misconceptions that prevent them from finding fulfillment in life. Among other things, this includes acquiring the capacity for intimacy and making a connection to something beyond the self, such as God or Inner Truth.

My main premise is that Core Energetics involves using yourself, including your own feelings and what is going on for you at the moment. In this paper I will present a series of different circumstances in which I believe group leaders get into trouble or behave in a way that hinders the group's development. I will try to present the way out of these situations.

The Core Energetic Process Group

What makes a Core Energetic process group different from any other group? There are three main elements to a Core Energetic Group. First, there is the use of the energy component. There is an energy supply in the body that is not being used because it is blocked or armored, or it leaks out of the body. This is a major concept in Core Energetics and it is the origin of the principle of charge and discharge, a principle used to make this energy available to the body. To charge means having the client move physically so that the energy that is blocked is put under pressure. To discharge means to utilize different physical positions and movements to release this energy into the body. It is important to note that the energy is released into the body so that feelings can emerge; it is not thrown out of the body.

The next major difference is observing and using the body for diagnosis and treatment. Why look at the body? Because this is the essence of Core Energetics, I want to clear up some basic misconceptions about looking at the body. Taking off clothes necessarily brings up feelings of vulnerability, and the actual act of undressing and dressing should be private. Two-piece bathing suits for women and shorts for men are appropriate dress because this attire allows you to see enough of the body to observe the major blocks. When the person appears, he/she should be taken in and honored for his/her courage and vulnerability. It is at this point that you need to take at least five minutes to really just look at the body. Be direct and tell the client why you are looking. Acknowledge their feelings and answer any questions they may have. You are looking not only for diagnosis, and what you see, but to be aware of how you feel about what you see. The art of Core Energetics is bringing your awareness of yourself into the work instead of pushing it away and getting above it. The act of looking and what it brings up could be the entire work and may be the work of the whole group.

The third element differentiating a Core Energetic group is the spiritual conviction that true healing and change really occurs only when we make contact with our inner "Core." This is our God-self, our Truth, our Higher Self, our Inner Wisdom, our Love. All are the same; it is the search for wisdom beyond the

mind. The desire for this adds an important dimension to the work, whether you contact your God-self or not.

The Differences Between an Individual Session and a Session in a Group

There is a world of difference between an individual session and a session in a group. The difference begins with the attention and energy you give to the client. In a session, the client get 100% of your attention. In a group, the client should not get more than 50 % of your attention. You must give at least equal energy, if not more, to the other members of the group. If you don't, they will become bored, which means they're not involved in what's going on. That is why, for want of a better word, there is what I call the "Entertainment" factor in a group. The best form of entertainment is when there are strong emotions involved in the "performance" and the audience (members of the group) share and identify with the experience. I don't mean to imply that a session in a group is a performance. It must be a true journey to whatever depth the person is capable of going in the moment. But others must be involved and not excluded. A soft intimate voice in a session in front of the group is death to the energy. But, again, this doesn't mean you don't want to establish intimacy in the session; you do, but the group must be included in that intimacy.

You might start an individual session with some physical work to help ground the client but it's even more important that every group begin with Core Energetic exercises. Everyone, including the leader, has come from a different place, bringing different energy, the stresses of the day, or even just the pressure of arriving on time. Getting your energy flowing together helps bring everyone into the moment and makes all participants more available to enter the group process. It is important to bring everyone into the same moment so that mutual energy exists for the group to use. That is what grounding really is: being in the moment.

The transference to the leader of a group is different from transference by an individual client to the therapist. The client hears opinions and interpretations from the therapist and takes them in, while at the same time resisting the "authority figure"

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with a “what do you know” or “of course you can say that” attitude. In group, the feedback can come from peers, who ideally don’t have a stake in anything other than saying their truth as they identify with the experience. The impact from this can be much greater than in a private session and the potential for change is, therefore, also much greater. The goal for the leader is to have the members of the group give as much feedback as possible. In the ideal group, the members are not even aware of the direction and form the leader is creating. Much of the effect of the work comes from the client taking risks to the brink of where he/she is able to go, feeling the danger and threat present in the risk, and being able to feel support and identification from other members of the group.

Another characteristic of a group session is that you can use the members of the group to assist and touch the client. There are many advantages to this. The most important is that members of the group become involved, bringing their energy to the work. A major goal in the work with a session in a group is to use the energy of the group to take the work further and deeper than it would otherwise be possible. For example, if the work is tender and the client’s heart is open, having members of the group who feel so moved make a pile of hands on the heart will add great impact to the work and to the bonding of the group. Please note that I said “members of the group who feel so moved.” It is important not to make it a requirement to touch or support someone. It needs to be okay not to. Then the support becomes real and can have effect. Any time you ask someone in the group, or the group as a whole, to do something, you must ask if it is okay. If you don’t, they will resent it and the experience will lack authenticity.

The way you use yourself as leader in a group is of great importance. You can make choices to reveal yourself much more than you would in an individual session. It does not serve the group for the leader to create an air of always knowing what to do. Revealing your doubts and allowing negativity to come towards you are great gifts to the group. The greatest sign of competence is being willing not to know, or not be sure. Then you are free just to be yourself in the group. What I am saying here is to take risks and make mistakes. That’s right, I said make

mistakes. Being careful of mistakes blocks creativity, and prevents spontaneity and flow. If your intent is to give your best, there is no such thing as a mistake, only another opportunity to discover something. What a gift to the group to admit you are wrong or sorry for something you did.

The most important thing to do when negativity comes towards you is simply to receive it and get beaten to death if that's what it takes (figuratively speaking—use a batacca or have them punch a pillow—you should never risk actually being hurt). Then admire the courage it took for the person to give that negativity to you. You don't even have to let the person know you admire him/her a great deal. Avoid the fear that you are going to be harmed, and the need to defend and protect yourself from being found "incompetent."

The rule that I would suggest is to consider that whatever you do needs to serve the best interests of the members of the group first, the individual who is working second, and yourself not at all. As soon as you do something for yourself, it is an abuse, represents countertransference, and you need to work on it in supervision. This is not to say that you don't get a lot of personal needs met in a group, particularly the needs to be appreciated, respected, even admired. They come as fringe benefits of having given of yourself for the benefit of the group.

In a group you can and *should* use the physical even more than in a private session. If you agree that we're working with energy and that energy can move, then it can move within the body. This is a lot of what Core Energetics is all about. If it can move within the body, it can also move beyond the body *and* reach someone else's body. This is an important concept because it means that the energy of the members of the group can also affect the person working at the moment. What do I mean by affect? What are we talking about when we say energy? For one thing, we're talking about feelings. Feelings ride in the energy and, for all practical purposes, feelings and energy are the same. My point is that you need to minimize the verbal and increase the experiential in the group experience, including as many members of the group as possible. The experience then remains in the moment and you can say, "see, that's what I'm talking about." Also, the energy (feelings) of each person created by the experience will affect

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everyone else in the group, because it goes beyond the individuals. The whole group experience is multiplied or increased by the volume of people and feelings. On the other hand, the opposite is also true: if you decrease the feelings of the individuals, you withdraw energy from the group. There is a difference between thoughts and feelings. Feelings are really just thoughts with increased intensity (Guide Lecture #45). If you stay on the mental, conceptual level, you decrease the intensity (energy), people emotionally “leave” the group, and it becomes difficult, if not impossible, for important work to occur.

Creating a Safe Environment

In groups you can “push” the work more than in an individual session. It is a big plus to create a situation where members of the group can protect each other, especially from you. So, if you have “pushed” or if the client feels threatened by you, you can appoint one or more guardians for that person as protectors from you. You, of course, must give over to the guardian. This can help someone take a risk he/she might not otherwise take. It also makes the group trust you more, and trust and depend on each other more. Therefore, the whole environment becomes safer.

You should not let anything you have become aware of pass. If you experience the slightest incident, you should make sure it gets included in the group experience. This too, even if it turns out to be unimportant, helps create a safe place. Along the same lines, any experience outside the group between members of the group needs to be brought back into the group. Some leaders discourage any relationships outside the meeting of the group. I think this is a mistake because the opportunity to have the special, intimate relationships that the group can produce should not be wasted. The very process of healing yourself and taking the other in creates an intimacy that we’re all longing for in our lives. However, if a sexual relationship, special friendship, meeting or phone call is kept “private,” it creates a schizoid-like split in the group, an energy leak, making the group unsafe. If these relationships are brought back into the group, the group has a chance to process very rich and meaningful material about how each person feels. Giving permission for reactions both from

those “left out” and those in the relationship, without judgements, benefits the whole group.

At least ten minutes should be left at the end of every group to give anyone who might be holding on to something a chance to share it. This will allow them to feel better about themselves and adds to making the environment safe.

My definition of leadership is simply being of service to those who follow you. You lead as long as you have something to give that is needed by others. And they, as followers, choose to give over to you, not because you are always right or smarter, but because they trust you to do what is in their best interest.

Competition and Conflict

There are two main types of competition that occur in a group. Competition among members of the group to be the favorite and get the attention of the leader; and competition with the leader to be better, know more, get the allegiance of the other members of the group and have the leader fail.

The important issue regarding competition for the leader is not so much to try to be impartial and fair, but to allow the competition to come out and be exposed. The work is not about what will happen or who will win. It is about discovering the deep misconceptions in the soul that need to be healed. A valuable barometer is to ask those who worked whether they feel closer, the same or more distant from each other. Also check out whether they feel good about themselves. The purpose of this is to notice what makes people feel good about themselves, and what makes them feel closer to others. It is usually the opposite of what they think. For example, being angry and expressing the lower self will usually make those involved feel closer to each other because they were aware of the negative energy anyway, and letting it out brings relief and safety. When reality has a chance to present itself, even if it is unpleasant or undesired, there is joy in the soul.

Competition with the leader is somewhat different. The issue for the leader is to receive it and make it safe to compete without competing back. Admire their courage and allow them to feel the support of the group as much as possible. If you compete back, you will probably win the competition, but you will lose a valuable opportunity to create safety and trust with this person.

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It is important to acknowledge the competition as soon as you become conscious of it. Then try to manifest the environment for the person to explore it as directly as possible. The specifics of what to do are not really important at this time. The important thing is bringing it to the consciousness of the group, and then trusting whatever happens will be okay. Conflicts between members of the group are dealt with in exactly the same way as competition with the leader: by bringing it to consciousness.

Music and Prayer

I use music in all my groups. Music has the potential to create an emotional memory. When you hear a song under emotional conditions, the emotions connect with and memorize the song, and then when you hear it again the same emotion is produced. For instance, if at the end of every group a certain song that touches your heart is played, it will help the members of the group open their hearts and feel a certain bond with each other. I want to say clearly, "it will help;" this does not mean everyone will open his/her heart. Many other factors need to occur to make the environment right for hearts to open, but music can be one of these factors. Even hearing the song outside of the group will arouse feelings and "memories" of the group.

Another important use of music is pleasure. It lightens the work and also allows it to be fun. Of course, we can move to the music and add Core Energetic exercises or dance, and create a pleasurable energy together.

Perhaps one of the most important tools that is forgotten by group leaders is prayer. There is prayer at the beginning of the group or in attunement. This would be a prayer to give your best, to truly want everyone to get what they need. There is prayer during the work: to have the person take a risk to go to a difficult place. Pray to have them feel good about themselves. There is another kind of prayer I want you to consider: the prayer to relinquish having to know what to do. Get yourself out of the way and let God do the work, and you just watch. For example, suppose you, who always know what to do, are feeling stuck. Being stuck is just a pause in the work before going on to the next thing. The client doesn't know that you're stuck. Simply pray to God to have the patience to wait for the next thing to happen,

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and trust whatever happens is sent by God. You may need to move your own energy by jumping up and down, as did a student leading a group in a class I was teaching. She was then able to go on from a centered place, and the group was very impressed with her creativity. If you do something unusual, it is important to check how the group felt about it. It may bring up the most important piece of work.

The final thing I want to say about groups is that no matter how the group is going, leave time in every fifth to sixth group to work on issues among members of the group. This will prevent slights, judgments, etc., from going underground. Having a forum where the only work done that day relates to interactions between members of the group clears the air and keeps group members feeling safe.

It is nice to share my passion for this work. I hope it has some meaning for you, and I welcome your comments.

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